

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SF, PINS, PINT

SUBJECT: JUNE 16 IN SOWETO-INITIAL REFLECTIONS

1. WHILE IT SEEMS, IN THE SHORT TERM AT LEAST, SOWETO ESCAPED
A REPEAT OF LAST YEAR'S RIOTS, AND MUCH OF THE JOHANNESBURG PRESS
IS FULL OF PRAISE FOR THE POLICE (FOR EXAMPLE THE BANNER HEADLINE
IN ONE OF THE AFRIKAANER NEWSPAPERS EFFUSIVELY PROCLAIMS,
"THANK YOU, POLICE"), UNDERCURRENTS OF DOUBT PERSIST AS TO
WHAT IT ALL MEANS.

2. MINISTER OF JUSTICE KRUGER, ON THE SCENE IN JOHANNESBURG THURSDAY,
JUNE 16, TO PERSONALLY SUPERVISE THE POLICE, APPEARS TO HAVE WON THE
BATTLE(KEEPING SOWETO UNDER CONTROL FOR THE 16TH) THROUGH HIS
POLICIES OF PREVENTIVE DETENTION AND MASSIVE POLICE PRESENCE,
BUT MAY HAVE TAKEN ANOTHER STEP TOWARD LOSING THE WAR (THE
ALIENATION OF THE HERETOFORE MODERATE BLACK COMMUNITY). AMONG
THOSE WHO, DESPITE THE RELATIVE TRANQUILITY OF THE MOMENT, SHARES
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A CERTAIN PESSIMISM IS TODAY'S HEREOOF THE JOHANNESBURG PRESS,
SOWETO POLICE CHIEF JAN VISSER.

3. VISSER, OF COURSE, DESERVES MUCH OF THE PRAISE HE IS REAPING IN
TODAYS PRESS(THE LIBERAL RAND DAILY MAIL FEATURES HIM IN A LARGE
COLOR PICTURE ON THE FRONT PAGE). WHILE NOT THE ARCHITECT OF THE
PLAN TO FLOOD SOWETO WITH RIOT TROOPS, HE WAS A STABILIZING

INFLUENCE IN THAT HE KEPT A TIGHT REIN ON THE POLICE (INCLUDING THE SECURITY/RIOT POLICE BROUGHT IN) AS BEST HE COULD AND SEEMS TO HAVE CURTAILED THE POLICE USE OF FIREARMS (HE WANTED TO KNOW OF EVERY INSTANCE IN WHICH SHOTS WERE FIRED, HOW MANY, AND WHY). HE EMPHASIZED THE USE OF TEAR GAS TO BREAK UP POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS AND CAN HARDLY BE BLAMED FOR THE ABUSES TO WHICH SOME OF HIS MEN PUT THE TEAR GAS. NUMBERS OF ARRESTED ARE VERY LOW (NO OFFICIAL FIGURES YET BUT ESTIMATED UNDER 50). MOREOVER, IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THE PRAISE, VISSER THANKED THE PEOPLE OF SOWETO FOR THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION. ALSO, WHILE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN VISSER HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS "UNRESPONSIVE" TO COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE INDISCRIMINATE USE OF TEAR GAS, HE HAS INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO PURSUE ALLEGATIONS OF UNPROVOKED SHOOTINGS (HE HAS QUESTIONED AT LENGTH INDIVIDUALS CLAIMING TO HAVE BEEN SHOT BY POLICE IN UNPROVOKED ATTACKS AND SOUGHT TO VERIFY THEIR CLAIMS).

4. IT IS OF COURSE, OPEN TO QUESTION WHETHER VISSER'S PREFERRED APPROACH, THAT OF "RECOGNITION" OF THE SSRC AND COOPERATION WITH IT WOULD HAVE PREVENTED VIOLENCE ANY BETTER THAN THE SIEGE CONDITIONS APPARENTLY DEvised BY RIOT POLICE HEAD KRIEL OR MINISTER KRUGER. THERE IS LITTLE DISPUTE THAT SOWETO WAS KEPT QUIET BY THE INFUSION OF HUNDREDS OF ARMED POLICEMEN, BUT KRUGER WILL FIND IT DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN A PRESENCE THAT LARGE FOR LONG. IT'S HARD LUCK FOR VISSER THAT THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF SUPPRESSING THE JUNE 16TH DEMONSTRATIONS FALLS ON HIS (OR HIS SUCCESSOR'S) SHOULDERS. THERE ARE ALREADY OMINOUS (FROM A POLICE PERSPECTIVE) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SIGNS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE DIFFICULTIES IN USING BLACK POLICE TO SUPPRESS BLACK POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS, SUCH AS WHEN BLACK RIOT POLICE RETURNED THE BLACK POWER SALUTES RAISED BY GROUPS OF STUDENTS LAST THURSDAY (SOMETHING THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN SHOT AT FOR A YEAR AGO). ANOTHER INTERESTING FACT WAS THAT BLACK TRAFFIC POLICE SUPPORTED THIS YEAR'S STAY-AWAY CALL EN MASS ON THURSDAY, THE 16TH.

5. FINALLY IT MAY BE THAT THE "PEACE AT ALL COSTS" APPROACH WAS VINDICATED IN LIGHT OF THE EXAMPLE SOWETO BLACKS SEEM TO SET FOR THE REST OF THE NATION. KRUGER WAS PROBABLY ONLY TOO AWARE OF THE DANGERS POSED BY A RIOTING SOWETO AND ITS INFLAMMATORY EFFECT ON OTHER BLACK TOWNSHIPS THROUGHOUT SOUTH AFRICA. IT MAY BE, THEREFORE, THAT WHILE VISSER IS RIGHTLY CONCERNED WITH THE LONG TERM PROBLEMS HE MUST FACE AS SOWETO'S POLICE CHIEF, FROM A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, KRUGER'S HEAVY HANDED APPROACH MAY HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED IN TERMS OF CONTAINING THE SPILLOVER EFFECTS OF JUNE 16TH. KIRBY

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